



## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

### **Response to Head of the OSCE Mission in Croatia, Ambassador Peter Semneby**

As delivered by Political Counselor Bruce Connuck  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
March 10, 2005

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to very warmly welcome Ambassador Semneby here, on what I understand will be, his last appearance in the PC as Head of Mission Croatia. I would like to take this opportunity to thank him for his fine work over the past several years.

I would also like to welcome Deputy Minister Vidosevic for his appearance together with Ambassador Semneby. It reflects the excellent relationship that has developed between the government of Croatia and the mission.

Croatia continues to make progress in several areas related to the mandate of the mission. Both rounds of the Presidential elections were declared by domestic observers to be free and fair. Some irregularities in the process have triggered a healthy debate in Croatia on continuing electoral reform. We support the mission and ODIHR remaining engaged in assisting this process.

There continues to be some progress on refugee return. However, problems remain, particularly the actual implementation of the Government's announced plans to provide housing solutions for former holders of Occupancy-Tenancy Rights as well as implementation of legislation and court actions. The recent Pizzeria Sara case noted by the mission is an example of unfair policies and apparently biased courts. Obstacles to sustainable return such as this must be removed.

We support the continued involvement of the High Commissioner on National Minorities and his recent trip to Croatia. Minority rights and refugee returns are inextricably linked, and more progress must be made in this regard, especially the "welcoming" of returnees by local Croat officials and communities.

The Croatian court system must prove itself professional and unbiased if it is to take over cases from the ICTY. We note ICTY Chief Prosecutor Del Ponte's correspondence with Ambassador Semneby concerning the possibility of the OSCE monitoring specific ICTY cases if they are transferred to Croatia, and we would support such an undertaking. Continuing Croatian cooperation with ICTY is vital, in particular the need to locate and arrest fugitive General Gotovina. While we take note of recent statements by high-level government officials that measures to locate Gotovina are being stepped up, actually turning

him over to the ICTY will be the only way to demonstrate Croatia's intention to follow through on this issue.

We are also concerned about a recent criminal libel case involving Croatian journalist Ljubica Letinic. Journalists should not be subjected to such prosecutions and we hope that Croatia will decriminalize libel by removing it from the criminal code.

I would like to thank the delegation of Croatia for circulating its government's three-year national program for the suppression of trafficking in persons and its action plan for 2005. In particular, the list of projects is comprehensive, and we welcome input from the OSCE Special Representative on combating this modern form of slavery, and whether the OSCE could be of assistance with any of these projects. We hope that Croatia will continue to update us on the progress of this very ambitious program.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.